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RECIPES FOR COOKING

MUSKRAT MEAT

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RECIPES FOR COOKING MUSKRAT MEAT

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INTRODUCTION

Because of the scarcity of other meats, Americans will be eating more poultry and domestic rabbit. Some will try muskrat, or "marsh rabbit," as it is sometimes called. Muskrat was highly esteemed, especially in winter, by the aborigines of North America. The voyageurs, trappers, and hunters roasted it over the coals of the camp fire, and traders and Indians dried the meat for winter food.

In modern times many persons also have eaten the flesh of the muskrat and relished it. Some have declared that it is game worthy of an epicure and has a flavor somewhat like that of the wild duck shot in the same marsh in which the muskrat fed. Its flavor has likewise been likened to that of the famous terrapin of Chesapeake Bay. The muskrat is mainly a vegetarian and feeds on the roots and stems of such aquatic plants as cattails, sedges, bulrushes, wildrice, pond lilies, and waterweed.

Fresh muskrat meat is available during the open trapping seasons in various States. This period extends from November to April, depending on State laws. Muskrats are sold extensively in some of the markets of the East. In Washington, Baltimore, St. Louis, Wilmington, and Philadelphia, they are sold as "marsh rabbits," but no attempt is made to conceal the fact that they are muskrats. They can be purchased cheaply as they are trapped for their fur and the additional labor of preparing the meat for market is slight.

Muskrat is eaten by all classes of people. It is a favorite dish at dinners given by church societies in Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey, and an annual muskrat banquet is a fixture with certain gun clubs in both the East and the West.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR DRESSING AND COOKING

The flesh of the muskrat, dark red in color, is fine-grained and tender. Prejudice against the meat results usually from lack of skill in cooking or from carelessness in skinning the animal. The musk glands often come off with the skin, and only in summer does the musky odor pervade the flesh. Care should be taken to avoid cutting into the musk glands, and any subcutaneous glands that may adhere to the meat should be trimmed off.

The dressed muskrat should be soaked overnight in slightly salted cold water to draw out the blood and reduce the gamy flavor. Weak vinegar also reduces the "wild" taste and tends to make the meat more tender. A pinch of baking soda may be used for the same purpose.

Young muskrats, like young rabbits, can be cooked by the quick methods of frying or broiling. Older animals require longer, slower cooking. The latter are excellent served in fricassees, casserole dishes, muskrat pies, croquettes, chop suey, and other ways adapted to mature meat.

RECIPES

The recipes given here are typical of the many suitable for cooking this meat. When properly prepared, it is highly palatable.

Fried Muskrat

Disjoint the muskrat and cut it into desired number of pieces. Par-boil for 20 minutes, drain, and wipe with damp cloth. Fry plain in a heavy skillet. If preferred, the pieces may be dipped until well-coated in a smooth batter made by beating one egg yolk in half a cup of milk, adding three-fourths of a teaspoonful of salt, and stirring in half a cup of flour, and dropped into hot fat. As soon as the meat is browned, reduce the heat and cook slowly until tender. Serve on a hot platter and garnish with parsley. A rich, brown gravy may be made by stirring flour into the pan drippings, adding a little water or milk, and cooking until thickened.

Wine-fried Muskrat

Soak muskrat overnight in slightly salted water. Drain and boil in fresh water until tender. Separate the meat from the bones and fry in shortening. As this is frying, pour over it a little sweet wine, sherry wine being generally used. Some prefer to serve the meat on a hot platter and then pour the wine over it.

Broiled Marsh Rabbit

Clean and wash the muskrat and wipe it with a damp cloth. Butter thoroughly and brush with a thin mixture of vinegar and mustard. Dust well with prepared poultry seasoning, place in broiler, and broil for 20 minutes.

Smothered Muskrat

After soaking the muskrat overnight, drain and parboil for 20 minutes. Heat some sausage or bacon drippings in a thick skillet and sear meat in it. Season with salt, pepper, and chopped onion. Sprinkle with flour and add a little water. Then cover and allow it to simmer until thoroughly done.

Maryland Potted or Baked Muskrat

Soak 2 muskrats overnight, drain, and cut into pieces. Pour boiling water over meat, stir thoroughly, and drain. Place in a thick skillet or iron pot, add a little water, a pod of red pepper or half a teaspoonful of red cayenne. Season with salt and pepper to taste, a little sage and 4 tablespoonfuls of bacon or sausage drippings. If desired, a generous piece of washed salt pork may be used instead. Sprinkle flour over top, cover, and bake in a moderately hot oven until tender, basting several times until well browned.

Enough potatoes for the meal may be cooked with the meat, or the muskrat can be served with diced, buttered white or sweet potatoes, peas, or carrots.

Muskrat a la Terrapin

Boil the meat in slightly salted water for about an hour or until tender but firm. Drain off the cooking water. Remove the meat from the bones and cut it into small pieces. Cover the bones with cold water and let simmer. Then add this juice to the meat. For each muskrat, hard-boil 3 or 4 eggs. Mash the yolks with 2 tablespoonfuls of butter, stir until smooth, and add a level tablespoonful of mustard, a tablespoonful of flour, and about half a cup of cream. Put in the chopped egg whites, and pepper and salt to taste. Then mix all of this with the muskrat meat and cook 15 to 20 minutes, or until thick. Before serving, add a glassful of sherry wine.

Michigan Special

After soaking the muskrat overnight, disjoint it and cut it into pieces. Put it into fresh water and parboil for 5 minutes. Drain and rinse with warm water. Place in a roaster and cover with canned corn and a little water or milk, using 2 cans of corn to 3 muskrats. Add salt and pepper, 3 medium-sized onions, and 2 tablespoonfuls of butter. Place in a hot oven and stir the pieces as they brown. Bake about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours, or until the meat is well done.

Layered Muskrat and Corn

Soak muskrat overnight in slightly salted water. Drain and parboil for 20 minutes in fresh water seasoned with a little celery, onions, salt, and pepper. Separate the meat from the bones and place it in a casserole. Layer it with canned crushed corn (a layer of corn and then a layer of meat), topping off with the corn. Add a little milk, place in oven, and bake until well done and properly browned on top.

Marsh Hare a la Louisianne

Disjoint legs of muskrats and soak them in vinegar for 30 minutes or more. Remove from vinegar. Salt and pepper well, place in hot cooking oil, and brown. Then remove to another pot with about 2 quarts of hot water. Chop fine a piece of celery, parsnip, and a small head of garlic. Brown the chopped seasoning in the cooking oil in which meat was browned, add 2 cans of tomato or pimento sauce, and cook over a slow fire for 5 minutes. Pour this sauce into pot with the muskrat legs and cook over low heat until done, adding salt and pepper to taste, a teaspoonful of sugar, and a few bay leaves.

Pickled Muskrat

Place muskrat in a crock or glass jar containing a solution of a cup of water, a cup of cider vinegar, a tablespoonful of salt, mixed spices, and bay leaves. Let stand in a cold place for at least 24, and preferably 48, hours. Then simmer in the same mixture until tender. Remove meat, strain off the spices and bay leaves, and thicken the liquid with flour and water to the desired consistency.

This dish is best served with potato dumplings. To make the dumplings, fry a medium-sized onion in 2 tablespoons of fat, then pour this over 4 cups of diced bread, and mix by hand. Add a cup of mashed potatoes and mix thoroughly, then 2 raw eggs, half a cup of flour, and salt to taste. Fashion lightly into large balls, drop into boiling water in an uncovered pot or kettle, and cook for 20 minutes. Serve with brown gravy.

Muskrat Pie

Soak muskrat overnight in slightly salted water. Drain, wipe the meat with a damp cloth, and cut into two or three pieces. Place in a

kettle, barely cover it with water, add a little salt, and let simmer 1 to 2 hours until the meat is tender. Pour off and measure the broth. Remove the meat from the bones in large pieces. Chop up an onion, a green pepper, and half a cup of parsley, and put in a skillet with several tablespoonfuls of butter or other fat. Cook for a few minutes, stirring frequently. For each cup of broth, take $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoonfuls of flour and mix well with the fat and seasonings. Pour in the broth and stir until thickened. Salt to taste and add a dash of tabasco sauce. Mix in the meat well and place in individual baking dishes. Cover with pastry and bake in a moderate oven until the crust is a golden brown.

Maryland Shredded Muskrat

Soak 2 muskrats in slightly salted water for 2 days, changing the water twice a day. Cut up and boil in water sufficient only to cover. When tender, remove meat from the bones, and shred into small, narrow pieces about 2 inches or less in length. Place in frying pan or other container with just enough of the liquor in which the meat was boiled to cover, add 2 tablespoons of bacon drippings, 1 tablespoon of sage, a little cayenne pepper, and salt and black pepper to taste. Place in oven, turn frequently until well browned but still moist, and serve hot.

Muskrat with Tomato Sauce

Disjoint and cut into pieces 2 muskrats. Place in a deep pan, cover well with water, add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonful of black pepper, a pinch of salt, and 1 sliced onion, and cook about an hour, or until thoroughly tender. Melt half a cup of fat in a thick skillet. Place meat in the hot skillet, brown on one side, turn, and immediately pour over it about two-thirds of a small-sized bottle of catchup and a teaspoonful of Worcestershire sauce. If desired, the pieces of onion saved from the first water and a small piece of celery may be added. Almost cover with water and let simmer until the gravy is thick enough to serve.

Muskrat Patties

Soak muskrat overnight in slightly salted water. Drain and parboil in fresh water until tender. Remove the meat from the bones, run through meat grinder if desired, season with salt, pepper, and onion, mix in a small quantity of bread crumbs, and fashion into patties. Dip these into well-beaten egg, then in crumbs, and fry in deep fat until brown.

Muskrat Salad

After soaking muskrat overnight in salted water, drain and boil in fresh water, seasoned with salt, and pepper for flavoring, until meat is tender but firm. Separate meat from the bones, cut it into small pieces, and prepare like chicken or other meat salad. With mayonnaise only added, it may be used as a sandwich spread.

Stewed Muskrat Liver

Care must be taken to remove all gall bladders. Soak the livers overnight in fresh water. Simmer for 10 minutes, draw off the water, and then simmer again in water in which a small piece of salt pork has been added. Salt and pepper to taste, add sliced onion, and stew down, thickening the liquid with a little flour.

Muskrat liver is somewhat grainy. However, it tastes like that of chicken and is much relished.

Preserving Muskrat Meat

During the trapping season the wives of trappers and farmers living on or near marsh areas where muskrats are produced preserve the meat for later use. This is done by ordinary home-preserving methods. A favorite way is to parboil the meat, fry it lightly, and then pack it tightly in glass or earthen jars. Melted fat should then be poured over it until it covers the meat about one-quarter of an inch, in the same manner as country sausage is commonly preserved.

The quick-freezing method and the locker service furnished by ice and refrigerating companies have made it possible to develop still further the preservation of muskrat meat. The usual procedure is to blanch or lightly parboil the meat, wrap it in special waxed paper, and then quick-freeze it.



POTTED OR BAKED MUSKRAT (RECIPE PAGE 5)



MARYLAND SHREDDED MUSKRAT (RECIPE PAGE 5)

